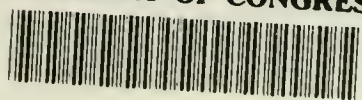


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# The Present State of Historical Writing in America

- I. BY J. FRANKLIN JAMESON
- II. BY JOHN BACH McMASTER
- III. BY EDWARD CHANNING

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# THE PRESENT STATE OF HISTORICAL WRITING IN AMERICA.

## I.

BY J. FRANKLIN JAMESON.

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The Present State of Historical Writing in America is a large subject. It is natural, when this Society stands so near to the hundredth anniversary of its foundation and is upon the threshold of a new building and, as we all hope, of a new stage in its activities, that the President should wish to mark the transition from the old conditions to the new by a thoughtful consideration of the actual status in America of that study to which the Society is dedicated. Such thought may enable us to enter upon the new era with a full consciousness of the setting in which this organization is to play its part, the *terrain* in which it is to manœuvre. The metaphors imply that the Society is not to drift, but to make a conscious and deliberate effort to relate its activities to the present status of historical science in this nation, and by such effort to advance that status. Yet how many difficult questions must be answered before we can fully describe this present condition of things, this stage of advancement which it is so important for us to understand! Merely to enumerate some of them may be somewhat profitable and impressive, but it will be obvious that no one brief paper can go far toward making real to us the whole circle of what we think to survey. What stage of progress have we reached in the accumulation of printed materials for history in our libraries, or of unprinted materials in our archives? How largely have the latter been reduced to order and made ready for the use of scholars? How



much have we done in the publication of documentary materials, what remains undone, and how well are we doing such work? What is the quantity and what the quality of our output of historical monographs? What is upon the average the mental calibre and what the training of those who make them? How do we stand with respect to the publication of histories of a higher order, marked by literary sense or the effort to generalize? How deep or how copious is American thought on the theoretical or philosophical aspects of history? How largely have our historical workers pursued, or appreciated, or been affected by, the advances made in the many other sciences to which history is more or less related? What are the present purposes, nature, and effects of American historical teaching, elementary, secondary, collegiate, or university, which after all represents far more than nine-tenths of the total effort expended on history in this country? In our universities, what is the status of research? How are our historical societies and journals performing their functions? What is the character of those books of history which most hold the public attention—so far as the public attention can be said to be held by any books whatever? What sort or quality of history is presented to the popular mind in the ten-cent magazines and the newspapers, which now constitute almost the sole reading-matter of American mankind?

Not one of these questions is easy to answer, yet all must be answered before we can adequately picture to ourselves the present state of historical writing in the United States. It is vain to make any attempt this morning to pursue them all, but it may not be vain to have enumerated them; for if then we perforce narrow the scope of the present paper to a consideration of a manageable portion of the whole field, we shall nevertheless do this with some consciousness of the relation which that portion bears to the whole unmanageable total.

In selecting a part of the field, it is natural for me to think of that which is represented by organized activi-



ties in the pursuit of history, partly because I have been for some years occupied with a corner of that lesser portion, rather than with literary histories, and have no doubt that

My nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand ;

and partly because it is much easier to make general and summary statements concerning the results of organized historical work than concerning those more various and literary activities and products which spring from the free spirit of the individual historical worker. We can apply the pedometer and the stop-watch to Pegasus in harness much more easily than to Pegasus in spontaneous aviation.

How then do we Americans stand with respect to organized historical work? The question may be answered by comparison with our status at some period in the past, by comparison with the stage of progress exhibited by the chief European nations, or by comparison with some ideal which, given our opportunities and our resources, we should be expected to have reached. It may also be answered by consideration of the various forms in which, in any country, historical work is usually found organized, the chief typical organizations for the pursuit of our study. If we choose to subdivide and classify, we may speak of the historical work of governments, of societies, of professional journals, of universities and colleges, and of co-operative organizations formed for the production of a given work. At all events these have been in this country the most significant forms in which historical work has been organized.

Intelligent democratic governments will usually show more tendency to subsidize such publications as make immediate appeal to the mass of mankind, such as will rapidly inform or educate great numbers of readers, than such as make their appeal to the few, teach the teachers of teachers, or lay secure foundations, far below the surface, for the best work of future generations. Relatively to the resources of the country, our federal

government turned out better historical work seventy years ago, in the days of President Sparks's volumes and the folio "American State Papers," than it has in more recent years, when it has become more perfectly democratic. But never did any government in the world's history pour forth such a mass of information regarding any great series of events, nor scatter the volumes of information so freely, as did our government in the case of the 128 volumes of the "Official Records of the War of the Rebellion." It is hardly less characteristic that our government historical volumes, whether well or ill executed, have been brought out casually and sporadically, with no previous and expert effort to form a comprehensive and systematic plan. A clerk of a committee thinks it would be an excellent thing to have a compilation of documents on the history of a given matter, and that he is the ideal man to prepare it. He readily persuades his chairman, the chairman somewhat less readily persuades the committee, the committee perhaps persuades Congress, and we have one more historical "pub. doc.," possibly in several volumes, possibly worth having, but very likely not half so useful to the cause of history as twenty other compilations that could be suggested. Efforts to improve this course of procedure, to provide the government with a steady supply of expert advice on documentary historical publications, are under way, and a bill is before Congress, but its fate is of course by no means certain. Under the present system, or want of system, in selecting what shall be done and who shall do it, our government's historical publications are, on the average, not only far inferior to those of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Austria, but even to those of small countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Denmark.

In respect to our State governments, a various tale is to be told. Many of our newer states, in the West and South, are putting forth most creditable work, worthy of being compared with what countries of equal population and resources in Europe accomplish.

Examples are Wisconsin,—a commonwealth having perhaps the most enlightened and progressive government in the United States,—Iowa, Illinois, North Carolina, and Virginia. These States and some others have put their historical work into the hands of persons who know not only how such things should be done, but also what is worth doing, facing with fresh and open minds the question, What has been really important in the development, social, economic, and political, of a nineteenth-century democratic community? Most of the older and richer State governments of the northeast, on the other hand, have steadily maintained antiquated and conventional views as to what is worth while in documentary historical publication. That of Massachusetts has for fifty years displayed the most astonishing indifference to her history, publishing almost nothing out of the rich stores of her archives, in a period in which a dozen American States and nearly a dozen European countries have revolutionized the writing of their histories by extended and judicious publication of fresh original materials. Other of the eastern States have continued to putter with muster-rolls and the military records of wars already well known, quite as if no breath of new life had swept across the historical field since the early days of Victoria and Van Buren. Here again a defective organization is frequent, while in the West and South large results have been derived by either one of two excellent modern systems, that of the state-supported historical society, best exemplified in Wisconsin, or that of the state historical commission or department, exemplified by North Carolina and Mississippi.

On the whole it is our historical societies that have made the largest gains in productivity during the last twenty-five years. The number of those which are in active existence is very great, probably more than two hundred, a far larger number than those of Great Britain, and perhaps as large as that of the strictly historical societies of France or of Germany. The number of members is still more impressive. There are



ten thousand members of historical societies reported in Pennsylvania alone. The pecuniary resources of these societies are also great. No doubt they form the richest body of such societies in the world. Their buildings are certainly worth in the aggregate as much as two million dollars, their libraries more than a million, their endowments something between one and two millions. Doubtless the work which they are doing, in the way of research and publication, is not always in full proportion to their wealth, but it is very much better than it was twenty-five years ago. They are less inclined to print essays written by their members, often discursive or of temporary utility, more inclined to print documentary materials, which will have in the future the same original value they have at present. The number of members sufficiently educated in history to insist on good workmanship in the published products of the society has greatly increased. This is especially true in the eastern States. The number has also greatly increased of those who, having a keen practical eye to the uses of history, make or sustain the societies' efforts to direct attention toward those elements in state or local history which have the highest degree of real importance. Such members, persons who see state or local history in its broad relations to national history, and disregarding tradition take up those topics that promise most in the way of fresh and vital instruction, are naturally more numerous among the more open-minded men of the West. The eastern societies are still prone to pursue a certain number of conventional themes—the early voyages, the Indians, the battles of the Revolution, the interminable biographies of deceased members. They are also, as we should expect, little inclined to lift their eyes over their own state borders and take broad national views. In five years of work in Washington, so circumstanced that I am likely to know of historical researches undertaken in national archives or library, I have hardly known an instance in which the publishing authorities of any

eastern historical society have set on foot any serious researches in those great and rich repositories. Seldom indeed do they touch the period since 1783.

Nevertheless much has been gained. Twenty-five years ago the publications of most of our historical societies seemed, at least to impatient young minds, hopelessly provincial and unscholarly. But we were then just at the beginning of a new period in all our historical work. The preceding generation had felt the influence of the best European standards in the domain of historical literature, ours was to feel it in the domain of historical criticism. Prescott and Motley were of the school of Thierry and Mignet, Bancroft a disciple of Heeren; we were to be followers of Ranke. A generation of criticism of sources could not fail to have its effect on societies largely devoted to their publication. Exactness of text, minute care in annotation, adequate attention to bibliography, elaborateness of indexing, characterize the volumes put forth by most of our historical societies, even though sometimes they are applied to materials of trivial importance, hardly worth the pains expended upon them.

Besides this improvement in method on the part of our state and local historical societies, we are to note the growth in recent years of many historical organizations whose scope is national. Foremost among these is the American Historical Association, founded in 1884, and already the largest, and presumably the most useful, historical society in the world. Others, while not limited geographically in their scope, are devoted to the American history of a single religious denomination. It is noteworthy that the American Jewish Historical Society and the corresponding Catholic organization have been much more fruitful of good works than the historical societies founded in the various Protestant bodies, which have hardly awakened to the value and interest attaching to American religious history.

Another interesting growth of recent years is the group of organizations devoted to the history of the

various ethnic elements which have entered into the population of the United States—such as the German American Historical Society, the excellent Swedish Colonial Society, and that larger association for Scandinavian-American history which seems now to be in process of formation. No one who appreciates how important it is to the American life of these newer elements that they should remember and respect the culture they brought with them, can fail to regard these as among the most useful of our historical societies. Useful to their members, they are capable of being doubly useful to the rest of us, who are prone constantly and enormously to underestimate all but the English element in American development, prone to take the view assumed by the London paper of August, 1909, which thanked Heaven that the North Pole, though unhappily not discovered by an Englishman, had yet been discovered by an Anglo-Saxon—meaning the celebrated Dr. Cook, *geboren* Koch!

In our survey, then, of the present state of historical writing among us, we may look with legitimate complacency upon the stage of development which our historical societies have attained. It is true that there are at least forty historical societies in Europe which are doing work of a grade hardly attained by more than two or three of ours. It is disquieting that in so rich a country there should not be a larger number of well-to-do amateurs engaged in the work of these societies, which normally would attract the interest of well-to-do amateurs in a very high degree—so at least one would expect, and so it has been in other countries and periods. But the disinclination of the American rich to intellectual production is evinced in many another field, and at all events the outlook for our societies is in most ways encouraging.

Of our historical journals most of the same things are to be said which have been said of the societies. Nearly all of them, indeed, are organs of particular societies, and cannot be expected to rise in quality, or



in influence upon other historical work, above the grade fixed for them by the qualities of the societies from which they spring. I may be permitted to say much the same of the general organ of the profession, the "American Historical Review." Without denying or palliating faults in the editing, one may safely say in general terms that it is about what the status of historical science among us permits it to be. Its chief articles seem to me to compare favorably with those in some of the better sort of European journals. Its reviews of books are inferior. In the first place, we have not developed so large a class of persons who, whether they themselves write or not, are accomplished judges of what historical books should be. In the second place, there are many subjects or fields, especially in European history, in which no American has acquired a large amount of expert knowledge, partly because our remoteness from European archives and libraries has made it a difficult matter to acquire such familiarity, except in fields for which the sources have to a great extent already been published. Finally, there is the well-known excess of our national amiability, heightened in the case of the historical profession by the friendly and truly fraternal feelings which frequent meetings in the sessions of the American Historical Association, and frequent participation in common tasks for its service, have engendered. It is a beautiful trait, rooted in benign conditions of social development, but it stands in the way of incisive criticism. I should be sorry to see our *Gelehrten* speaking of each other as the Germans still sometimes do, but if they would be more rigid in their standards and more plain-spoken in their criticisms, they would do more to improve American work.

When we come to speak of the American universities as part of our machinery for historical production, it is impossible to repress a certain feeling of disappointment. Thirty years ago, when the Johns Hopkins University was beginning its extraordinary mission in the higher education, and graduate work in the

United States was in its infancy, we all felt that a historical professor had it as one of his normal functions to produce historical books at frequent intervals, and that the young man whom he was training in the preparation of a doctoral dissertation was, in the normal case, producing simply the first in a long series of historical monographs. Time and the vast hordes of youths eager to acquire collegiate education (or of parents eager to pay for it) have somewhat undeceived us. The truth is, that more than half of our historical professors do not produce anything at all, and most of the others produce only very slowly: and the doctoral dissertation, instead of being the first in a long series of *Arbeiten*, has been in more than nine cases out of ten, by actual calculation, the young man's sole and last contribution to his science. Doubtless the prime duty of a college teacher is to teach, and the multitudes clamoring more or less actively for historical instruction should receive it; but one cannot resist the wish that the young teacher might, like the young oyster, be carried by artificial means across that critical period of danger to his life which ensues when he is first compelled to go forth into a world of pressure and struggle.

The authorities of universities still appreciate that original research is necessary to the mental health of professors and to their highest usefulness as teachers, and are in some degree aware that, from the point of view of the nation at large, it is a pity that so large a body of persons specially trained for historical investigation should be debarred from it; but there seems to be little chance of immediate remedy in the case of most teaching professors. Meanwhile, however, some of the most enterprising of the western State universities, taking a leaf out of their experience in the sustaining of agricultural and other scientific research, have begun an interesting experiment by the appointment of men who are not expected to teach, but to occupy themselves with historical researches deemed especially useful to the State. Much may be done by such especial foun-

dations; but it will be remembered that bright expectations of the same sort were entertained concerning fellowships thirty years ago, when they were first installed in our system.

Last among the forms of organized historical work to be considered is the general history produced by co-operation. Not unknown in previous centuries, this *genre* of historical composition has especially flourished during the last generation. Spain, France, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Mexico, all have furnished excellent examples. Twenty-five years ago the United States provided an elaborate one in Justin Winsor's "Narrative and Critical History," and has not surpassed it since. The merits to be expected from such undertakings, in an age of specialization, are obvious. As literary products, as efforts toward the profounder interpretation of the national life, they are sure to suffer from the prescription of uniformity among their component parts. They will usually succeed better in the summing up of results already achieved by the writers of monographs than in the pioneer work of developing new thoughts or opening up new fields of research.

In non-literary labors, however, in the plodding mechanical work of bringing additional bodies of material to the knowledge of students or making them accessible in print, there is a far greater field for co-operative endeavor than is commonly realized. This is a subject especially deserving the attention of American historical societies. We are a nation notoriously apt for organization. Our librarians, our scientific men, our teachers, have shown conspicuous success in bringing about valuable results through co-operation. The more plastic historical organizations of our western States have lately shown their ability to unite by engaging in a most interesting common task, the making of a calendar of all the papers in the French archives relating to the history of the Mississippi Valley—a task transcending the scope of any one of these organizations,



yet which would bring almost unlimited duplication and waste if each should attempt independently to perform its own local part of the whole. The historical societies of the East have hitherto shown almost no sign of the ability or the wish to co-operate, though it would be easy to name a score of undertakings which especially invite co-operative labor. To take an imaginary instance, yet not wholly imaginary, let us suppose that one of the New England societies or states possesses a part of the essential materials for the study of the régime of Andros and Dudley, another society, another portion, and so on. Can anyone commend a procedure whereby each society, without concert with the others, publishes (or neglects to publish) solely the fragments of the whole mass which it happens to have in its building? Can the historian be well served by the result—one part printed on one system in 1850, let us say, another part printed on another system in 1900, a third part still reposing in manuscript, and all parts treated on the basis of the accident of possession? It is but an ideal illustration, but the principle is a practical one, of frequent application. Situated as the American Antiquarian Society is with respect to the more local historical societies of the eastern States, it is ardently to be hoped that, in the new era opening before it, a considerable part of its duty may be felt to be the promotion of broad-minded and active co-operation among its fellow societies.

The picture I have attempted to draw of the state of organized historical work among us is not altogether a gratifying one. But I am much attached to that saying of Bishop Butler, "Things are as they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we deceive ourselves?" I see no occasion in these matters to be either optimist or pessimist. Much better and more rational than either, is to be a meliorist, believing that conditions are improving, doing one's part to make them improve.

## II.

BY JOHN BACH MCMASTER.

Had some member of our Society, at its first meeting nearly a century ago, undertaken to review the state of historical writing in our country since the Revolution, his task would have been easy. A History of New England by Hannah Adams, a couple of works on the Revolution by Ramsay, American Annals or Chronological History of America from its Discovery by Abiel Holmes, Marshall's Life of Washington, Minot's History of Shays's Rebellion, a View of South Carolina by Drayton, and a View of the United States by Tench Coxe, a History of Virginia, another of Pennsylvania, another of the District of Maine and Minot's Province of Massachusetts Bay, would about complete the list. Conspicuous by its absence from the list is a class of historical works for the production of which the time was well fitted. Thirty years had passed since the surrender of Yorktown, and two and twenty since Washington took the oath of office as first President of the United States. That the rebellion of the thirteen colonies, the fight for independence, the partition of the British Empire, the desperate struggle for life which followed the Peace of Paris, the adoption of the Constitution, and the starting of the little republic on a career of astonishing prosperity were events of no common sort in the history of mankind was well known to the Fathers. Yet none of them thought it worth while to write out for posterity a full and truthful narrative of the part he played in the founding of a great nation. Some five and forty years separate us from the surrender at Appomattox; and our library shelves are loaded with books written by those who were conspicuous in the struggle for the preservation of the nation. Nothing of this sort was done by the men who witnessed the Revolution, the fall of the Confederacy and the adoption of the Constitution. Those who wrote produced books of little interest to posterity. We could easily

spare the Notes on Virginia if the author had devoted the hours spent on the composition of it to the writing of a monograph on the Framing, Adoption, and Signing of the Declaration of Independence, or "My Own Story" of his stormy administration. We should be glad to exchange, a Defense of the Constitution of Government of the United States of America, for the Personal Memoirs of John Adams while a member of the Continental Congress, while peace commissioner, minister to Holland, and Great Britain, and President of the United States. We should much prefer a narrative by Monroe of his diplomatic experience in Spain, England and France, to his Examination of the Conduct of the Executive. The writing of history in those days was little better than a pastime to which gentlemen of literary taste might turn from more serious occupations. Histories of States, histories of towns were written, but no work of wide range and serious importance was undertaken till well past the first quarter of the century.

Meantime the basis for such a work, a great body of original material, was slowly being formed. Such Historical Societies as existed, put forth their Collections, Transactions, Proceedings, some State papers and public documents were printed; biographies of a few of the Revolutionary leaders were written, and more than forty books of travel, by foreigners and natives in various parts of our country, were published. This was a good beginning and in the decade which followed 1830, a great stride forward was taken. Jared Sparks, our pioneer in historical literature, opened it with the Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution. Then came his Life of Gouverneur Morris, the series known as the Library of American Biography, the Works of Franklin, and the Writings of Washington. The assaults made by later editors on his methods and his texts are well founded. But he deserves to be remembered as the first man to ransack the archives of States and families at home and abroad in search of the materials of our history, and bring together and make accessible



a vast quantity of papers scattered over the land in public and private collections. The decade was notably rich in source material. To it belong Irving's *Voyages of the Companions of Columbus*—a companion piece to his *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828-1831), the *American Archives of Peter Force*, *Elliot's Debates in the several State Conventions on the Federal Constitution*, *The Life, Correspondence and Papers of John Jay*, and Gilpin's collection of the papers of Madison. What is even more interesting, it was in this decade that the first great American historian made his appearance. When in 1834, George Bancroft published the first volume of a *History of the United States*, he stepped at once into the front ranks of historical writers. His style no longer appeals to us. The tone of exaltation, the liberty which he took with quotations have often been condemned. But his widespread and long continued search for original documents, his accuracy in the statement of facts marked him out as a real historian; and to him belongs the honor of having placed the writing of history in our country on a high plane of scholarship and of starting it on an honorable career. His point of view was that of the philosophical historian. He analyzes the characters of men, and from history, as he narrates it, draws lessons of political wisdom. The sociological side interested him not at all. The period which he covered lacks but three years of three centuries. Yet the astonishing changes in manners and customs, which separated the Americans who adopted the Constitution from the English colonists who founded Jamestown and Plymouth, find no place in his pages.

For a decade and a half Bancroft was without a rival in his chosen field. The writers of history were more busy than ever. Histories of cities, histories of towns, histories of States, mostly worthless, and biographies of men great and small came by scores and hundreds from the press. Above the mass of busy writers there rose a few masters who, thinking the annals of their own land too prosaic, sought and found their

themes elsewhere. Prescott, before 1850, took the reading public by storm with his *Ferdinand and Isabella*, his *Conquest of Mexico*, and *Conquest of Peru*; and ere another decade went around Hildreth had written the history of our country from the discovery of the New World to 1821, Palfrey was at work on his *History of New England*, and Motley had made himself famous in the Old World and the New by his *Rise of the Dutch Republic*.

Thus was it when the Civil War opened; three of our countrymen had produced works so important in their subject matter, so broad in scope, so scholarly and so well written as to entitle them to a place among the world's great writers of history. A fourth who, in the opinion of many, has outstripped the three, had opened his story of the French in America with the *Conspiracy of Pontiac*. Each one of them belonged to the literary and dramatic school of historians. It was by no mere accident that Motley began his literary career with a novel called *Merry-Mount*, and Parkman his with *Vassall Morton*. These bespoke their type of mind. The things that would interest them in history would be, not the great masses of toiling men, not the silent revolutions by which nations pass from barbarism to civilization, from ignorance to knowledge, from poverty to wealth, from feebleness to power, but the striking figures of history, great Kings and Queens, the leaders of armies, men renowned for statescraft, and the dramatic incidents in the life of nations. Each must have his hero and his villain, his plots, conspiracies and bloody wars. Just as Froude had his Henry VIII; just as Macaulay had William III, Carlyle his Robespierre and Cromwell, and Thiers his Napoleon, so Motley had his William of Orange and Philip of Spain, Prescott his Cortez, Pizarro, Ferdinand and Isabella, and Parkman his Pontiac, Frontenac and La Salle. History as viewed by writers of this school is a series of dramas in each of which a few great men perform the leading parts and use the rest of mankind as their instruments. And what could be more dramatic than the periods they

chose—Spain at the height of her power and glory, the Conquest of Mexico and Peru, the struggle of France and England for possession of North America, the rending of the Empire of Philip II.

The Conspiracy of Pontiac met with little favor at home or abroad. But very different was the reception given him when fourteen years later he published the *Pioneers of France in the New World*, and followed at intervals of two years by *The Jesuits in North America*, and *La Salle*, and the *Discovery of the Great West*. These were masterpieces. The incidents were dramatic, the characters strongly drawn, the setting of forest and prairie, lake and frontier, was picturesque, and the well told narrative as interesting as fiction. No finer examples of this particular school of history are to be found in any language.

By the close of the sixties much of the early history of our country had thus been covered by writers of distinction. Irving had told the story of the discovery of the new world, Bancroft that of the English colonies from their settlement to the Revolution, Parkman that of the French in Canada and the Valley of the Mississippi. But the history of the United States from the admission of Missouri where Hildreth left it, was still unwritten. The material for history was diligently gathered. Biographies, histories of States, recollections, memoirs, books and pamphlets on every possible phase of slavery and its issues, diaries, compilations of the speeches and letters of statesmen, were produced in abundance; but no attempt was made to tell the story of the last forty years. The march of a people across a continent, breaking prairies, clearing farms, constructing steamboats, railways, canals, opening routes of trade and commerce and building towns and cities as they went, and dealing with grave financial, industrial, and economic questions with a boldness and on a scale nowhere else attempted, furnished none of the dramatic incidents which appealed so strongly to the historians of the school then in high favor.



With the close of the Civil War, however, a great change began in historical writing. Since that time the history of our country has been written and rewritten in the greatest detail. Not only does that dreadful struggle mark the end of an era in our national life as distinct as that of the war for independence, but it also marks the beginning of a change in our point of view of our history. This was manifested in the first place by the eagerness with which every scrap of information regarding the war has been collected and printed, an eagerness not shown by those who took part in the Revolution. Scarcely had the smoke of battle cleared away when the participants on both sides from the highest to the lowest made haste to tell of their part in the war. We have histories of particular battles and particular campaigns, of regiments, brigades, corps and armies, narratives of life in the prisons, and of escapes from the prisons, of blockade runners, of private soldiers; memoirs, Personal Memoirs, Own Story, by generals and admirals on both sides, and of men who filled high places in the State. The Federal Government at a cost of several millions has published the official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies and Navies, many of the States have done the same, and Military Societies have been organized to gather and preserve authentic material.

The interest in our history aroused by the Civil War was still further stimulated by the centennials of the battles and events of the Revolution, by the founding of Patriotic Societies, and by the establishment in our Universities and Colleges of chairs of American History. The result has been both bad and good. Bad, in that it has brought forth books utterly worthless as histories and designed to catch the popular interest and enrich the publisher. Good, in that it has led to a study of our history with a care and detail such as was never made before. No part of it has been passed by, and much of it has been rewritten. The part covered by Bancroft has been traversed in far more attractive form by Mr. Fiske, and is now being rewritten in a truly

scholarly way by Mr. Osgood and Dr. Channing. Mr. Schouler has written our history from the close of the Revolution to the Civil War, Von Holst our Constitutional History to 1861, Justin Winsor edited the Narrative and Critical History of America to 1840, Wilson the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America, Frothingham the Rise of the Republic of the United States; and the whole story from Columbus to the end of the nineteenth century has been told in the American Nation, edited by Dr. Hart. Special periods have called forth the remarkable histories of Mr. Henry Adams and Mr. Rhodes. From the graduate schools of our Universities have come year after year monographs of no mean sort. Material for the history of our country is collected in no one place. A part is in the Old World buried in the archives and libraries of England, France and Spain. A part is at home scattered over all the land from Maine to California in the archives of six and forty states, in a thousand libraries and in private hands. Travel which a search for it entails is costly both in time and money. And so great is its bulk that the mere examination of it is beyond the span of life allotted to any man. The historian who should undertake to write even a century of our history, examining every source with the infinite care so necessary to a true understanding of every event, would assume a task physically impossible to perform. To him every well written monograph is a godsend indeed; and it should, in fairness to the hundreds of young men who have prepared such monographs, be said, that they have been exceedingly well done. And so, too, has much of the work of our later historians. They have found out that war and strife, treaties and conventions, the doings of great leaders and the platforms of great parties do not contribute all that is worth noting in the life of a people. They have found out that the invention of a labor saving machine, the discovery of a cure for some dread disease, may really be a more important event in the history of a nation than any battle its generals ever won, or any treaty its statesmen ever concluded.

## III.

BY EDWARD CHANNING.

History is a mode of thought and expression. Historical writing is the application of the historical method to expression with pen and ink. Historical labor finds its activities in many directions. It may be grouped under three heads: (1) the collecting and printing of original sources; (2) the reporting on masses of material or on specific topics; (3) historical writing. The first two of these groups represent craftsmanship; the third division represents art. It is necessary for the elucidation of the ages to gather documents into storehouses and to make them accessible by various modes of arrangement, by convenient calendars and lists of one kind or another. Some of this material is in printed books; another part is composed of original manuscripts. Between these two divisions is a series of limited duplications by means of transcripts which are made by hand, or by the typewriter, or, in a more limited form, by photography. Of these the photograph is the best and, in view of the great improvements that are being made in photography, it might not be amiss to suggest that it would be well to postpone or to restrict the duplication of manuscripts until the time comes when they can be reproduced by the camera. The task of making accessible the tools of the historical writer is a necessary part of historical labor and those who engage in it deserve appreciation and recognition,—they are the altruists of the profession, in that they cut themselves off from the reputation-making forms of historical endeavor.

The second class of historical labor presents itself to the mind under the words reports, theses, and doctoral dissertations. Hundreds and thousands of young men and old ones, as well as the middle-aged, all over the country are devoting themselves, with the greatest assiduity, to the making of extracts and abstracts of original sources, arranging them under appropriate



headings, and translating them into twentieth century English, as ordinarily used in America. These monographs, reports, and dissertations, thus laboriously compiled, are issued in the printed form by universities, some of which do not confine themselves to the printing of works produced within their walls, but take what they can get; others are issued by learned societies under the names of transactions, publications, proceedings, or collections. Given an adequate amount of material and a sufficiency of time, he must be a mediocre man, indeed, or one whose brain has become indurated, who cannot produce a monograph or volume, or even a series of volumes of this type.

Of recent years, the output of doctoral dissertations has greatly increased, owing in part to the establishment of a large number of fellowships which are oftentimes designated as being for research. The ultimate aim of nearly every one of the seekers for doctorates is to engage in the teaching of history in a university, a college, a normal school, or perchance, in a high school. The importance of providing a constant stream of youthful, well trained pedagogues is recognized by all, and justifies the founding and giving of scholarships and fellowships. But we should realize that the production of pedagogues is not the same thing as the bringing forth of scholars, much less is it the making of historical writers or historians. Professor Jameson has remarked upon the barrenness of our doctors. I, too, as a teacher of youth, a conductor of doctoral candidates, a guider in the evolution of theses, have become conscious of the pertinacity with which writers of essays and theses in our colleges and universities, whether they get doctoral degrees or not, stop with the work they do under direction. Get them out of the university, get them away from professorial stimulus, make them teachers, make them librarians, and their original work stops. It is the most heart-rending thing that university teachers of history have to face at the present time. As incitements to individualistic, original research, pecuniary aid has

not as yet proved effective. The man who is going to be a great seeker after truth and a fruitful setter-forth of the facts of human history to his fellowmen cannot be a recluse, living on the scanty bounty of fellowships as they have been and are administered by American universities. The historical seeker and writer must have interests that will compel him to come into contact with other human beings. The names that occur to us of great historical writers, Gibbon, Macaulay, Trevelyan, and Lecky in England, Bancroft, Parkman, Irving, Prescott, Motley, and Palfrey in America, are not those of closeted students, living on the bounties of others. They were all active in pursuits, other than those in which they won their fame. In saying this, I am referring solely to the production of writers of history. Scholarships and fellowships have their justification in producing teachers, catalogue-makers and other craftsmen; but the artist is not to be thus made. The man who has it in him to write a great book will do it and do it better if he has to earn his own living, and is thereby forced into contact with his fellowmen, even if he half starves in the midst of his career.

The qualifications of the historian are multitudinous. He must have training in research, must be able to handle material in manuscript and in printed form, and to sift the truth from the falsehood. He must have the faculty of using the work of others, of recognizing first-class monographs at a glance, almost. The materials of American history are so vast that the historian, even of a fairly limited period, can hardly hope himself to read all the original sources. He must use the work of others; but he himself must also constantly be using original materials; otherwise he will lose the faculty of recognition; and he will miss that local color and flavor which make historical writing tolerable. The task of the historical writer is on all fours with that of the person who works with colors,—the historian seeks to reproduce with the pen the impression his research and reading have made on his mind, as the artist seeks

to reproduce mental impressions with the brush. The task of the man who endeavors to state the truth in an attractive manner in words is far more difficult than that of the novelist or the poet. For the one is hampered in every line by the necessity of speaking the truth, the other is not. The task of the historian is constructive, by reproduction to place in public view the record of the bygone times.

With the worker in colors, the novelist, and the poet, the historian must possess imagination. He must be able to picture to himself in broad outline, the condition of a people at a given time, to see the march of armies, to recognize the inter-action of economic forces, and then to reproduce these impressions with a lightness of touch that will make them readable and with a heaviness of detail that will make them convincing. In his presentation, he must seek to produce a truthful impression upon his reader. Oftentimes, to do this he must sacrifice absolute accuracy in detail and in perspective. If the impression produced upon his reader is truthful, it matters little whether all his dates are correct, all his names are properly spelled, or if all his facts are accurate. Indeed, his dates may every one of them be correct, his names may all be properly spelled, his facts may be absolutely accurate, and the impression left upon his reader be entirely false.

The historian must be a person of broad sympathies; to be an antiquarian is not enough. He must have some sympathy with the ways of the economist and must regard the march of fact in the light of the laws of human development. Professor MacMaster has rightly termed the older historians "dramatic writers." They attributed the Revolution to the Adamses, to Washington, to Henry, to Otis, and to the other great men of that epoch. Approaching the problem from a more modern standpoint, it becomes increasingly evident that the separation from England was largely due to the play of economic forces. At the same time, there is no such thing as economic history; all history is economic.



All historical development is founded upon industry, upon the necessity of supporting life, and the way in which it is done. It is impossible to separate economic history from political history. None the less, the historian owes a debt of deepest gratitude to the economist for rescuing his subject from the abyss of dramatism. The historian must also have enough of training in law to be conscious of the way in which lawyers look at affairs. He must realize the meaning of the word, of the phrase, "the law." It is true that the historian's business and the lawyer's business are very different. The qualities of the mind that make a successful historian are not those that make a successful lawyer; but lack of the feeling or the knowledge of how lawyers look at certain problems is fatal to the best historical production. Similarly, he must have some acquaintance with that which is termed science; he must understand the scientific temperament; and must know something of the results of scientific inquiry.

The historical writer must be a master of perspective; he must see events and men in their true relations. He must not exalt one period unduly, or give too heavy a weight to one set of events; he must not dilate too much on the influence of men and omit to set forth with equal skill the influence of underlying forces. This is not saying that an historical writer cannot treat a limited period or a limited topic or that biography may not be one form of historical writing; but within his field, the historical writer must see the perspective truly. This is one of the most difficult of all achievements for the historian, because in his researches, he is likely to come upon new material relating to some one part of his studies that no one else has ever seen, or rather that no one else has ever understood. The temptation is great to apportion his space according to the importance of his materials, not according to the importance of the events or the men.

The difference between the tasks of those whom I have termed historical craftsmen and those whom I

have called historical writers lies in the amount of thinking necessary for the best production in their respective fields. The searching for documents, the copying of them accurately, the verifying of texts, and the seeing them accurately printed is a work that demands time, labor, and patience. The writing of reports or theses likewise demands prolonged labor in searching out facts, some skill in ascertaining the truth of them, and some facility in putting them together. The object of these productions, however, is not so much to stimulate and interest large numbers of readers as to provide accurate and painstaking statements of fact for the use of university professors and historical writers. It is not expected of the monographer that he shall be interesting or stimulating, he can be as dry and detailed as he pleases. The object of the historian is very different and his mode of procedure must be quite unlike that of the purveyor of transcripts, the editor of original documents, or the writer of monographs.

The first thing that the historian must do, after he has looked over his field carefully, from one end to the other, and acquired some knowledge of relative values and perspective, is to familiarize himself with the facts. It is not enough for him to note down this, that, or the other on paper and then from these notes make up his text. He must pass all this matter through his brain; he must make it a part of himself. To accomplish this, he must become very familiar with his facts; he must be saturated with detail. He must be on speaking terms, so to say, with the men and women who take any leading part in his story. He must know, not merely a critical year or so, in their lives, he must be acquainted with their environment, with their upbringing, with their mental and moral qualities. In treating of economic problems, he cannot array a mass of facts on paper, he must make the facts part of himself; he must ponder them carefully, day after day, month after month, possibly year after year, until their true relation and interaction come to be revealed to him. It is only after this pro-

longed research, this saturation of self with facts, after having gone through these long mental processes, often fraught with serious misgivings, that the historian is prepared to put pen to paper and try to reveal to others that which the past has revealed to him. In writing he seeks to tell the story in such a way that his readers will become convinced without being aware that they are being argued with. In his statements he must be careful not to arouse opposition, but to produce the effect he desires by the employment of lights and shadows precisely as does the artist. He must weigh every sentence, nearly every word, with a view to euphony, to form, and even to grammar. In all this, he must put his own soul into his work and let it shine forth.

The labor and risk involved in producing even a small piece of historical writing is very great. Sometimes, the author feels that it would be advisable to stop. It is absolutely impossible to write a definitive history. Every historian misses or has not access to many, many facts and papers. At any moment a document may come to light to destroy all statements as to some one fact or series of facts; the next historical writer must revise the *dicta* of centuries. An author is always prejudiced by his environment; he is limited by the span of human existence. He must therefore apportion his time so that his chosen task stands a fair chance of accomplishment. Nor can he be blamed for closing his research and beginning the arrangement of his facts, for there is scarcely a field within the purview of the writer on American history that would not yield to research, if carried on for many, many years, or indefinitely. The time comes when the historian must begin to make up his mind. In doing this it is not at all necessary that he should have read every bit of evidence. Take the countless diaries and journals of the blockade of Boston, or simply those dealing with Bunker Hill; there are differences between them, no doubt, but in essentials they teach the same truths. These will be patent to the man of historical genius when he has read



three or four of them, and will never become visible to him whose mind works in another way, no matter how many he may read.

In looking about for writers of history in this country at the present moment, the seeker is met with greater discouragement than would befall him in almost any other path of original research. The American people are in the midst of a cycle of commercialism. There has not been a time for many years, at any rate, when scholarship has been so lightly valued in the United States as it is at the present moment. In talking with students, in viewing the books that are printed, one is driven to this conclusion, lamentable though it is. Scholarship is momentarily at a very low ebb, because it is not valued throughout the country at large. Nowadays the size of the output and not the quality of the production is what attracts attention. The standardization of education, not the making of scholars, is the cry. Let anyone turn the matter over in his own mind and see if he cannot count the really first-class works of American historical writers within the last twenty-five years, on his fingers; and yet conceive of the number of persons engaged in historical pursuits and the number of books constantly published under the guise of history! Some day the wheel will turn around; scholarship will again be valued as a national asset; and a new Parkman will arise! Possibly, he may produce only one volume, but if that volume shall be of the quality of the "Pioneers of France," it will do more for the cause of educating the plain people and the building up of his own reputation than the printing of documents by the ton or the publication of monographs by the dozen.









